SUPPLEMENT

TO THE

NONCONFORMIST.

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THE LIBERATION SOCIETY.

THE COUNCIL MEETING.

The annual meetings of this Society were held yesterday afternoon and evening. The meeting of the Council took place at Radley's Hotel at two o'clock, and there was an unusually large attendance of members from all parts of the country. Amongst those who were present, in addition to the gentlemen whose names appear in the proceedings as speakers, were the Rev. R. W. Betts, Peckham; Mr. B. Abbott, Croydon; Rev. W. Griffith, Derby; Rev. A. Tilley, Cardiff; Mr. Philip Ellis, Ossett; Rev. David Lloyd, Hitchin; Rev. H. Richard, London; Mr. H. R. Ellington, London; Rev. John Pillans, Camberwell; Rev. Professor Newth, London; Rev. A. Hannay, London; Mr. Stafford Allen, London; Rev. Mark Wilks, Holloway; Mr. H. Angus, Great Driffield; Mr. Daniel Pratt, London; Mr. Francis Clowes, London; Mr. Charles Reed, F.S.A.; Rev. Edward White, Kentish-town; Rev. John Curwen, Plaistow; Rev. R. Redpath, London; Rev. B. Etheridge, Ramsgate; Rev. T. Aveling, Kingsland; Mr. O. Prentice, Ipswich; Mr. E. A. Briggs, Daventry; Mr. J. W. Buckley, Croydon; Rev. J. Birt, Weymouth; Mr. H. Webster Earp, Melbourne; Rev. C. Bailhache, Islington; Mr. J. M. Hare, London; Mr. William Baines, Leicester; Dr. E. B. Underhill, London; Mr. H. Everest, Rochester; Rev. T. Morris, Whitchurch; Mr. John Bennett, London; Mr. J. P. Spencer, Bath; Mr. T. Bantock, Wolverhampton; Rev. R. Macbeth, Hammersmith, &c.

The Chair was taken by Mr. WILLIAM EDWARDS, the Society's Treasurer, who remarked that, looking at the present position of public feeling, he thought the Society had every reason to congratulate itself on its position. He himself had never taken a desponding view of their work, and still less could he do so now. He thought that they had obtained a great reward for their past labours. As they made further progress, it would, no doubt, be desirable to proceed with increased caution. It would be found that such persons as were in favour of a State Establishment of religion would, as they went on, be more and more anxious to retain their position, but he had no doubt of their ultimate success. Having directed attention to the result of the Treasurer's report, and to the gratifying response which had been made to the appeal for increased subscriptions, he called on the Secretary to read the report.

Mr. CARVELL WILLIAMS read the Report of the Committee, of which the following is the substance:—

The report, after stating that the facts which it embraced probably exceeded in importance those of almost any previous year of the Society's existence, referred to preparations made for the General Election:—

Of the practical issue of this electoral struggle, as seen in the composition of the new Parliament, the Executive Committee do not think it needful now to speak in more than general terms. That it does not include the names of certain of their friends, whose presence in the House of Commons would, at the present juncture, be of special value, is to them a matter of deep concern; but, having regard to the public pledges and the political tendencies of those who constitute the Liberal majority, it may be expected that the new Parliament will show itself superior to its predecessors, by making such additions to the statute-book as will enlarge the religious liberties of the people. But of far greater value is the fact, demonstrated by the late election, that invectives levelled at the Society, and denunciations of its "ulterior views," have failed to reconcile the nation to the perpetuation of injustice, or to check the growth of a feeling adverse to that relationship between the State and religious bodies to which the Society has declared itself to be opposed.

After describing the committee's preparation for action in the new Parliament, the report proceeded:—

Three months of the Parliamentary session having now passed, the Council have a fair opportunity of judging of the soundness and practical value of the committee's conclusions. And it is assumed that there will be unanimity in the opinion that, judged by the criterion of results, the operations of the Society during that period have been well adapted to further its designs, and that the expectations excited by the general election have been realised by the proceedings of Parliament.

Under the head of Sectarian Oaths and Declarations, the passing of the Qualification for Offices Abolition Bill and the Parliamentary Oaths Bill were referred to:—

Both these measures will, therefore, shortly become law; and though the grievance which they redress may be comparatively slight, its removal establishes the important principle that Englishmen may enter upon public offices, to which they have been called by their sovereign or by their fellow-citizens, without acknowledging the legal supremacy of the Church of England, or binding themselves to refrain from proceedings by which that supremacy may be endangered.

The following passage relates to Church rate abolition:—

Both the debate and division on the second reading of the bill justify the belief that the period is approaching when this vexatious ecclesiastical impost will cease to disturb the peace of the parishes, and vainly to consume the time of Parliament. That the bill which was rejected in 1863 by a majority of 10 should in 1866 have been carried by a majority of 33 is of itself a fact which is in a high degree encouraging to the Society's friends.

But it is the character of the discussion, and the conditional support given to the measure by Mr. Gladstone, on this occasion, which have made memorable this latest passage in the history of the Church-rate struggle. That distinguished member of the Church of England is now prepared to surrender the power which that Church has so long exercised, of compelling the whole community to contribute to the maintenance of its edifices and worship. He is willing that compulsory taxation for religious purposes—whether as regards Episcopalians or Nonconformists—should altogether cease; while, in return, he wishes to retain the use of parochial machinery for the purpose of voluntary rates, and claims for those who contribute money for Church purposes the right of controlling the expenditure, without interference from the parishioners at large. The committee, while they admit the reasonableness of this last-named requirement, believe that the interests of the Church of England would be best consulted were she to throw herself unreservedly on the liberality of her members, rather than rely on the ancient method of parochial assessment. There may also be room for apprehension that undue pressure will, in some cases, be brought to bear upon those who may be unwilling to pay the proposed voluntary rates. Yet, looking to the unquestionable value, both theoretical and practical, of the proffered concession—looking also to the fact that the suggested arrangement will chiefly concern Episcopalians, and will probably be transitional rather than permanent, the committee are of opinion that it would be inexpedient to oppose the settlement of the question on such a basis—provided that it can be effected—as they have reason to hope it may be effected—without a compromise of principle, or an undue limitation of parochial rights. If the primary object of the opponents of Church-rates can be realised by a method less simple and decisive than their own, but more in accordance with the feelings of yielding antagonists, the triumph will lose none or its lustre because graced by a spirit of generous moderation.

University and College Tests were next dealt with:—

To those who have become weary of this prolonged controversy, it cannot but be a welcome fact, that there has lately risen into importance another question, involving higher considerations than those belonging to a mere pecuniary exaction—the question whether all the advantages to be enjoyed in connection with the national seats of learning shall be enjoyed without regard to sectarian distinctions, or shall continue to be in the exclusive possession of a particular religious community.

There is no portion of their past work on which the committee look with greater pleasure than their success in securing the opening of Oxford University to Dissenters, and, subsequently, in obtaining for them the right to take certain degrees in that of Cambridge. These important concessions of the Legislature have borne their natural fruit, in the number of Nonconformists who have since become members of the Universities. Of these, several have, by their intellectual attainments, acquired a claim to the highest honours and the most substantial emoluments which Oxford and Cambridge have within their gift. The fact that these rewards cannot be bestowed upon them, because they are not Episcopalians, has made a deep impression upon an influential and growing party in the Universities, who, jealous for the honour and usefulness of the bodies to which it is their pride to belong, have originated movements the success of which will entitle them to the lasting thanks of Nonconformists.

The bills of Mr. Coleridge and Mr. Bouverie were described, and the results of the recent division reported; it being stated of Mr. Bouverie's bill that—

In 1864 the bill was supported by 101 votes, and was defeated by a majority of 56 (157 to 101). In the present session, when for the first time it received the active support of the committee, 208 votes were given in its favour, and it was carried through committee by a majority of 22. But, satisfactory as have been the divisions on these bills, the committee attach greater importance to the debates by which those divisions have been preceded. The promoters of the measures have been singularly fortunate in the conspicuous ability of the gentlemen in whose hands they have been placed, and generally, in the character of the advocacy by which they have been commended to the favourable consideration of Parliament. Nor can the committee refrain from publicly recognising, not merely the intellectual power, but the generosity of tone, the breadth of view, and the uncompromising firmness with which Parliament has been urged to adopt views which have only within a recent period found advocates within the pale of the Establishment. The ultimate triumph of those views—which cannot now be regarded as chimerical—will, probably more than any other legislative change, tend to obliterate these sectarian distinctions in social life—to generate an atmosphere of catholicity in which intolerance will find it hard to live—and to give to the intellectual and spiritual forces of the nation that free scope without which nations cannot permanently flourish.

Referring to the recent debate on the Irish Church, the committee

Have noted with pleasure the emphatic disclaimers, both in Ireland and in Parliament, of any desire on the part of Roman Catholics to obtain possession for themselves of any portion of the revenues now received by the Protestant clergy; but it cannot be doubted that there are not a few Liberal politicians who, either to pacify Ireland, or to maintain the Irish Church as a buttress of the English Establishment, are prepared to adopt a policy of indiscriminate endowment. In the event of their wishes taking the shape of legislative proposals, it will fall to the opponents of Establishments of every kind to take the foremost place in the struggle which must ensue. Meanwhile the committee call attention to the circumstance, that the defence of the Irish Establishment is mainly rested on the fact that *its* extinction would be fatal to the Establishment in this country, it being now admitted that in Wales, in Scotland, and in some parts of England also, the majority of the population do not belong to the Church which enjoys the patronage of the State. No fact could be more stimulating to English voluntaries in pressing the application of their principles to Ireland; nor are Irishmen likely to be quieted by the affirmation that their country must be oppressed for the sake of upholding an English Establishment.

The action of the committee in regard to the bills for the regulation of religious worship submitted to the Jamaica legislature:—It was stated that the extinction of the Jamaica Legislature, and the transference of the government of the colony to her Majesty, has removed all danger to the religious liberties of the inhabitants.

It has at the same time increased the responsibility of English voluntaries, since it will be their duty to make such representations to her Majesty's Government as will prevent the renewal of the oppressive act which devotes one-tenth of the taxation of an impoverished country to the maintenance of ministers whose adherents form but a small minority of the population.

The general operations of the Society were next reported. Wishing to adopt

Plans for the wider and more effective advocacy of the Society's principles, the committee have set before themselves, as the objects at which they should aim, the exposition of the positive truths on which the Society's action rests—the application of those truths to the circumstances of the times, and the choice of such varied modes of treatment as would be adapted to all classes of English society. They could find no more effective agencies for their purposes than the platform and the press; but it seemed to them to be practicable to employ both under new conditions, and with higher aims. For public meetings, therefore, they resolved to substitute, for a while, carefully prepared lectures on well-chosen topics; and, in order to secure variety of treatment, as well as some other advantages, they preferred seeking the help of several of the Society's most competent friends, to the appointment of a single lecturer, who would have devoted himself wholly to the work. So far as it has yet been tried, the plan has fully realised the committee's anticipations. Already a considerable number of lectures have been delivered; those provided for by the committee having been supplemented by others arranged for by local committees. These lectures have been argumentative in style, and Christian in spirit, as well as filled with information of great practical value. They have, for the most part, been listened to by numerous and highly appreciative audiences, and have also been extensively reported by the provincial press.

To improve the Society's stock of publications, the committee

Resolved to issue new series of Church-rate publications, of manuals for practical purposes, and of popular tracts, dealing not merely with the facts belonging to the existing Church Establishments, but

setting forth the general principles on which the objectors to such institutions rest their case. They, at the same time felt that the multiplication of publications of this class would leave unsupplied a want which has been increasingly felt in recent years, and that there should be produced some works of higher literary character and greater comprehensiveness, which would address themselves to the more educated portions of society. With that view they have prepared a scheme for the issue of a small number of volumes, which will include a History of the Rise and Progress of the Principle of Church Establishments—a treatise in which the Society's principles shall be expounded, with especial reference to modern theories and objections—a history exhibiting the relations of the Established Church in England to the State and to religious life during the last half-century—and an examination of the opinions of continental thinkers and statesmen, who, by intellectual processes of their own, have reached conclusions identical with those of English Voluntaries. Two other works also appeared to be essential for the purpose they had in view, viz., a popular exposition of the whole question in the form of a compact handbook of arguments and of facts, and a small volume which would be welcomed by those who desire to interest the rising generation in the principles advocated by the Society. To obtain this last-named work it was resolved to offer a prize of 50*l.* for its production; and, the time for its production having expired, several manuscripts are now in the hands of the gentlemen who have engaged to assist the committee by acting as adjudicators. In addition, it was resolved to adopt the suggestion frequently made by the readers of the Society's journal, the *Liberator*, and to circulate it gratuitously in quarters where such a compendium of information on ecclesiastical topics would be likely to convince candid opponents, or to stimulate inactive friends.

Several of the minor publications have, however, been produced, and have been already widely circulated; and the ability of the authors whose pens are now engaged in furthering the wishes of the committee leads them to believe that during the next season they will be able to report that the Society's depot has been satisfactorily replenished.

It would not (continues the report) have been possible for the committee to have presented such a record of work done, and of work projected, as is contained in this report, had they not been strengthened by the resolution of the last Conference to raise a fund of five-and-twenty thousand pounds for the extension of the Society's operations, and by the generosity which has to so great an extent carried that resolution into effect. The sum promised now approaches 18,000*l.*

The subscriptions for the year just closed are 3,000*l.* in excess of those of last year, and the balance in hand, as well as the income, is much larger than the Society's treasurer has ever before been able to report. But, to prevent misconception of the Society's pecuniary position, it is needful to state that the heaviest portion of the Society's contemplated expenditure, viz., that for literary purposes, has yet to be incurred, and that therefore the balance in hand will be required for the execution of plans already determined upon.

The report concluded as follows:—

Looking only at the occurrences of the last twelve months, and at the prospect immediately before them, the committee feel entitled to use language of unreserved gratification and hopefulness. Three years ago, when, overborne by the political interests arrayed against them, they determined to abstain for a while from Parliamentary warfare, they also resolved to lend their energies to work which would enable them to return with new power to the scene of conflict. Their day of waiting has not been long, and the wisdom of their course has been attested by the issue. Once more they are able to speak of visible progress; nor is it confined to the passing of legislative measures, or to the complexion of Parliamentary debates. It is to be seen in the consciousness of the public mind that the existing state of things cannot be abiding, and that it *must* be subjected to the rigorous scrutiny of national discussion. It is to be seen in the intense dissatisfaction of those, who, heretofore looking to the State as the Church's indispensable ally, now find the State's power of hindrance to be greater than its power of help, and feel that the Church's growth tightens beyond endurance the cords by which she is bound. And it is further to be seen in those intellectual tendencies of the time which, whether they be for good or ill, are undoubtedly adverse to the assertion of State-authority in matters affecting the beliefs and consciences of mankind. The whitening fields already give signs of a bounteous harvest, to be reaped by arms nerved by the consciousness that Omnipotence is on the side of those who wish religion to be advanced only by means worthy of itself. The supporters of this institution are not presumptuous enough to imagine that the change they so ardently desire will be effected by their unaided strength. It will be brought about by many influences, and by the work of many hands; but such power as they have should be used with God-fearing conscientiousness, and their opportunities, whether few or many, should be embraced with unresting ardour. The steps by which the goal before them is to be reached may be slow and toilsome, but, once taken, they will never be retraced, and, as it has been in the past, each onward movement of the future will promote the well-being of the country, and be hailed with thankfulness by the people.

The TREASURER presented his report, which showed that the total receipts, including a previous balance of 151*l.* 3s. 9d., were 7,740*l.* 1s. 8d., the subscriptions amounting to 7,556*l.* 5s. 9d. The expenditure had been 6,043*l.* 5s. 5d., leaving a balance in hand of 1,696*l.* 16s. 3d.

Mr. HENRY LEE, of Manchester, moved the first resolution, as follows:—

That the Council, in receiving and adopting the Report of the Executive Committee, expresses its gratification at the marked success of the Society's operations during the last twelve months, and, more especially, at the influence it has brought to bear upon the general election, and upon the various ecclesiastical measures submitted to the new Parliament. That the Council further expresses its pleasure at the liberal response already given to the proposal to raise a special fund for the extension of the Society's work, and trusts that this increase of its pecuniary resources will enable it to take full advantage of the growing tendencies of public opinion in favour of the principles which it advocates.

The speaker said he believed the resolution expressed exactly what had taken place during the last twelve months. For himself, he had been struck with the importance which was being attached to ecclesiastical questions by the great middle and working classes. The working classes especially were giving considerable attention to them, and they saw that the future welfare of the country was bound up with such questions. He thought that publications should be brought out especially adapted to such a state of things. It was very important, in view of a probable extension of the franchise—(cheers)—that the working classes should be indoctrinated in right principles. They did not as yet see clearly on the subject. State Establishments had hitherto rested on the assumption of a "Divine right"; but, as that theory had been challenged, the clergy were recommending their Church in other ways. No body of men, he considered, were working at the present time so zealously among the labouring classes as the clergy. They were endeavouring to reach every person, and by-and-bye they (Dissenters) would be asked what they were doing in the matter? (Hear, hear.)

The Rev. JOSEPH FLETCHER (Christchurch), in seconding the resolution, remarked that he was astonished at the labour which the committee had exhibited, and it was the first business of the Council to express their warm approval of the way in which the Committee had conducted the business of the past year. (Loud cheers.) After some reference to Parliamentary questions, the speaker went on to say that it now seemed as though the leaders of the Conservative party were bidding for their suffrages—(cheers)—but every measure which they carried through Parliament was sapping the foundations of the Establishment, and if they could go on as they had done recently, they would soon see the realisation of their hopes. Churchmen, to use a now famous expression, were our own "flesh and blood," men like themselves, and they would soon see the necessity of adopting their views. With regard to Church-rates, he had not expected to live to see the day when the author of the treatise on "Church and State" would consent to their abolition; but if Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Bright, and Mr. Miall could agree in a measure, they might be sure it was one which could be accepted by the country. Mr. Bright did them all high honour. (Loud cheers.)

The resolution was then passed.

Mr. J. SPENCER BELL moved the second resolution:—

That the Council congratulates Mr. Hadfield, M.P., on the fact that the Legislature is at length about to pass the bill repealing the declaration imposed on public functionaries for the purpose of protecting the Church Establishment and tenders to him the warm thanks of the friends of religious equality, for the unwearying perseverance which has enabled him to carry the measure seven times through the House of Commons. That the Council also views with much satisfaction the substitution for the oaths formerly taken by Members of Parliament, including the invidious and offensive one required of Roman Catholics, a uniform oath of allegiance only.

Mr. BELL, after some remarks in eulogy of Mr. Hadfield's indomitable perseverance, said that the ridiculous position taken by Lord Derby on this question had not a little helped them. With regard to the question of oaths, the Legislature had only come round to the opinion long held by some people. In his opinion, oaths had no effect in strengthening institutions. When it was considered how much had been effected in the few months of this unreformed Parliament, what might they not expect from a reformed one? But they must first inoculate public opinion with their principles. (Cheers.)

Mr. GRIMWADE (Ipswich) referred to the good done by the annual meetings. He was always astonished to find what had been effected and always encouraged to go on. He thought that their friends in the Church were getting more and more liberal.

The SECRETARY, before the resolution passed, wished to remark on the great pains which Mr. Hadfield had taken in getting this measure passed. His energy and vivacity were unequaled. Night and day he was at work. He (the secretary) had had opportunities, in connection with the Parliamentary business of the Society, to see what Mr. Hadfield had done, and it could not be too highly appreciated. (Loud cheers.) The resolution was then carried.

The Rev. CHARLES WILLIAMS (Southampton) moved the next resolution:—

That the Council is greatly encouraged by the increasing favour with which the House of Commons has entertained proposals for the abolition of sectarian tests in the University of Oxford, and for the removal of the statutary barrier to the admission of Nonconformists as fellows of colleges in both Universities. That in the spirit in which these proposals have been advocated by many members of the universities, the Council finds ground for the hope that the period is near at hand when all national institutions for the advancement of learning will be regarded, not as the stronghold of ecclesiastical monopoly, but as the inheritage of the entire nation.

He thought they should congratulate each other on having such a man as Mr. Coleridge to take charge of the Oxford Tests Bill. It could not possibly be in better hands. It was also a matter of special congratulation that so many members of the universities were in favour of Liberal measures. There was a similar liberal feeling growing in the Church, in which a party was rising who were as true friends of religious liberty as they themselves were. (Cheers.) He thought that Churchmen would soon outstrip them. In his own town there were many lukewarm Dissenters, but there were also many Churchmen who believed that the Liberation Society was doing great good. He hoped they should be able to congratulate Mr. Coleridge next year on the success of his measure.

The Rev. JOHN KENNEDY M.A. (Stepney), seconded the resolution. He called especial attention to Mr. Bouverie's bill, which would undo the work of the Act of Uniformity with respect to the colleges. In the spirit in which those measures had been advocated they could find promise of the final triumph of their principles. They did not hope for large numbers of Churchmen ever to forsake their Church, but their expectation was that many of them would see that it would conduce to the best interests of their Church that it should be separated from the State. The resolution then passed.

Mr. MIALL, who was received with loud cheers, moved the next resolution:—

That the Council regards with special satisfaction the fact that, after an appeal to the constituencies, the principle of Church-rate abolition has been again affirmed by the House of Commons. That, recognising with pleasure the expressed willingness of influential members of the Church of England to abandon compulsory exactions for religious purposes, and sincerely desiring a just settlement of this long-debated question, the Council does not feel itself at liberty to resist arrangements for that purpose, which, while acceptable to Episcopalians, shall not oppose the principles, nor violate the rights of Christian willinghood.

He asked the indulgence of the Council for a slight diversion from the order of business. He was extremely anxious with respect to the subject of the resolution which had just been carried, that the conference should understand the extent of the obligations they were under to another committee than their own for the progress that had been made. It had been his privilege to be selected as the sole representative of Nonconformists to sit on the Oxford Committee. He had met the members of that Committee often, and also other well-known Churchmen whose names were familiar throughout the land, and he must say that their liberality and breadth of view, their conscientiousness in expressing their opinions, and their fidelity to their principles, had been an example which he had highly valued. To a great extent they owed the present position of these questions to these gentlemen, and there were none amongst them (the Liberation Society) to whom they were more indebted than they were to those Oxford gentlemen, and none who took broader and deeper views of ecclesiastical questions. (Cheers. With regard to the resolution before him, he had not the slightest doubt that the bearings of Mr. Gladstone's proposals, as indicated by the right hon. gentleman's speech, had been scanned with both jealousy and anxiety. He wished to say that it was not a compromise. (Hear, hear.) It might be consolatory to some Churchmen to call it so, but they (the Dissenters) had gained the whole victory. Their desire had been to free Christianity from means inappropriate to its maintenance, and this they now hoped to secure. Their principle was recognised. He would rather it had been obtained in their own way, but they had contended mainly for freedom, and that freedom would be guaranteed. If he were legislating for the advantage of the Church, he should have taken Mr. Hardcastle's bill, but the Church had as yet no faith in her own principles. Mr. Miall went on to explain what he judged would be the operation of a bill such as that indicated in Mr. Gladstone's speech, and said he thought they could accept such a measure. (Cheers.)

Mr. E. S. ROBINSON (Bristol) in seconding the resolution, expressed a hope that the measure to be submitted to Parliament would not limit any of the present parochial rights of Dissenters, but he left the matter with perfect confidence in the hands of the committee. (Cheers.

An animated discussion then took place on various points connected with the settlement of the Church-rate question. Amongst those who took part in it were Mr. E. Grimwade, Ipswich; the Rev. I. Doxsey, Camberwell; the Rev. G. C. Hutton, Paisley; Mr. S. Courtauld, Braintree; Mr. Potto Brown, Huntingdon; the Rev. J. G. Rogers, Clapham; the Rev. W. Reed, London; Mr. John Edwards, London; the Rev. Joseph Fletcher, Christchurch; the Rev. A. Hannay, London; Mr. John Templeton, London; the Rev. J. Compston; Mr. Shaw; Mr. Nunneley, Market Harborough. The speakers urged that no parochial rights should be surrendered.

The resolution then passed with loud cheers.

Mr. S. S. MANDER (Wolverhampton) moved the next resolution:—

That believing it to be at the present time the duty of the friends of religious equality to advocate their principles with increased earnestness among all classes of the community, this meeting warmly approves of the proceedings of the committee in connection with the delivery of public lectures, and of their plans for the production of volumes, tracts, and other publications adapted to the present position of the movement.

Mr. Mander remarked they could only attain their object by producing conviction in the minds of the people. He thought that Englishmen were now especially prepared to discuss these questions with fairness and candour. The speaker reviewed the circumstances which appeared to render the present time peculiarly favourable for the discussion of their principle, and recommended that the Society should adopt the plan of the Anti-Corn-law League, and send their publications to every elector in the kingdom.

The resolution was seconded by Mr. Joseph Nunneley, of Market Harborough, and supported by the Rev. D. Jones, of Brixton, and carried.

Thanks to the chair were moved by the Rev. W. Reed, seconded by Mr. H. O. Wills, Bristol, and carried by acclamation. The proceedings then terminated.

PUBLIC MEETING.

The annual public meeting was held in the evening, as usual, at the Hanover-square Rooms; William Edwards, Esq., in the chair. Among those who were on the platform were Mr. Barnes, M.P., Mr. Crum-Ewing, M.P., Mr. Maclaren, M.P., H. O. Wills, Esq., of Bristol, James Bell, Esq., Edward Miall, Esq., Charles Reed, Esq., Henry Lee, Esq., of Manchester, Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, Professor Newth, Mr. Carvell Williams, Rev. J. Pillans, Rev. J. Harcourt, Rev. R. D. Wilson, Rev. Henry Richard, E. S. Robinson, Esq., of Bristol, and several of the Society's leading friends from the provinces. There was a large and very respectable audience.

The CHAIRMAN said that, before he called upon the gentlemen who were to move and second the first resolution, he felt it was necessary for him to say a few words as to the operations of the Society during the past year, and this was rendered necessary because their constitution differed from that of those societies usually meeting in May, as their report was not submitted to the meeting, but to a Council elected from the members. At their last meeting they looked forward to a probable change in the constitution of the House of Commons as likely to promote the interests they had in view; and the friends of the Society thought it a good opportunity to press upon candidates the ecclesiastical questions they had so much at heart. The result was, that in the present House of Commons there was a larger number of those who sympathised, more or less, with the movements of the Liberation Society. He did not assert that the Liberal members of that House went along with the Liberation Society in the principles they held, but they certainly did regard with some degree of interest and with feelings of justice the questions which that Society brought forward; and without committing themselves to the support of those questions, they were certainly in favour of measures of progress, measures which would certainly

tend to the advancement of liberal principles, and to the well-being of the country. During the Parliamentary recess the executive committee devoted much attention to a proposition made at the last Triennial Conference, the employing to a larger extent the press and the platform, so that the Society might bring its principles to bear upon the public in general. The time had been too short fully to develope this plan, but they were preparing to carry it out most fully. Another means proposed on the last occasion was the use of the platform as a means of disseminating their opinions. The Executive Committee had engaged gentlemen to lecture upon the objects of the Society, and the result was that much thought and much discussion had ensued, and attention had been called to the objects of the Society and to the principles they advanced. As much good effect he believed had resulted from this, as from large public meetings. With respect to the funds of the Society, he had the pleasure to announce that the income for the past year was 7,600*l.*, an increase of 3,000*l.* over the income of last year. That income, if continued according to promise for the next five years, would give them a sum not much less than 40,000*l.*—a sum which was an earnest of the zeal and fidelity and determination of their constituents in carrying on the work they had begun. The speaker went on to refer to the Parliamentary success of the Society in the question of Church-rates, the Oaths Bill, the Qualification for Offices Bill, and the two University bills, and to the debate on the Irish Church. He would express his own opinion that the question which was dear to them all was in a more favourable position than they had ever known it to be. From its commencement he never doubted its final success. The question was not one of expediency, but one for which they had the authority of the Bible for maintaining. They saw in that Word that the Church of the living God was to be entirely separated from the power and control and favour of man. He thought the time will not be far distant when they would realise the principles that actuated them; and their duty was to prepare public opinion to take advantage of any circumstances which the hand of Providence might present for opening the way to the solution of the great question. They must adopt political means for their object because the Church of England had been made a political Church by its connection with the State. He had no wish that Church people as a body should be political, but he wished that every religious man should remember that he was a citizen of a great country, and that he should bring his religious experience and character to bear upon all he did in connection with his citizenship. They were told that, were religion separated from the State, it would lose much of its force, but he had faith in the voluntary efforts of the Episcopalians, as he had in those shown in other denominations, to support the religious services of the country. And he could not give to the Nonconformists any greater credit for zeal in the support of their own form of worship than, he believed, was due to the Episcopalians in the support of theirs. (Cheers.)

At the close of the Chairman's address Mr Spurgeon entered the room, and was most enthusiastically cheered.

The Rev. J. G. ROGERS, of Clapham, moved the first resolution, which was as follows:—

That this meeting rejoices at the advance of public opinion in the direction of the objects aimed at by this Society, as evidenced by the results of the recent general election; by the passing of the Parliamentary Oath and Qualification for Offices Bill; by the present position of the Church-rate question; and by the willingness evinced in the Universities and in Parliament to abandon sectarian tests in national educational institutions. That in these and other facts the meeting finds proofs of the value of the Society's past operations, and incentives to new and more vigorous efforts on its behalf.

He said the resolution seemed intended to be the key-note of the meeting, and was an indication that their spirit was to be one, mainly, of rejoicing over the progress which they had made during the past year, which in many respects had been one of the most eventful in the history of the Society, not only in the direct results which had been secured, but even more in the indirect power which had been exerted, and the promise which had been given of greater fruit to be reaped in the future. (Cheers.) Last year they were in the midst of political stagnation and inactivity. He would not say who was the cause of this, because they should never speak ill of those who were gone, but there was an idea afloat that they had outlived all controversy, and that the time for fighting political battles was gone. He was afraid, even looking at the manifestation of public feeling on the Jamaica question, that there had been a considerable emasculation of liberal feelings and principles of large numbers of people in this country. But now there was happily a change. He did not say that the time of the singing of birds had come, but a great deal of the gloom of the winter had gone, and there were signs of awakening life and activity in every part of the political world. The *Quarterly Review* told the country very shortly after the late elections how much the Liberation Society had contributed towards the triumph of the Liberal party. There were some who thought that when there was a proposal made to raise a special fund of 30,000*l.* for the purposes of the Society, the intention was to use this money in bribing the constituencies to return men to Parliament who would support the Society's principles; but he could assure those who held this opinion that this was not the way in which the Liberation Society would stain its hands, and that if they had contributed, as they really had, to the success of the Liberal party, it was not owing to the subtlety of any measures that they adopted, to any particular craft with which their secretary was endowed, nor to their skill in electoral organisation: but it was owing to the fact that they had to a very large extent impregnated the minds of the electors with the great principles of religious equality, and that those principles were successfully asserted and vindicated upon the hustings. But more than this, they found when the thing came to be put to the test that as far as their questions were concerned the House of Commons had not been found wanting. In the first place, they had dealt with that paltry thing the Oaths Bill, which was really so contemptible a thing that it seemed hard to believe that for seven successive times it had to be sent up to the House of Lords, although Lord Derby had himself declared that the oath was not worth the parchment on which it was written, and it could only be explained on the principle that there was a great antipathy on the part of a large portion of the members of the Church of England to the Dissenters. Let them render honour to whom honour was due, and not forget their gratitude to Mr. Hadfield, who had so long and so consistently brought this matter forward in the House of Commons, and had now won the victory. (Cheers.) The very esteem in which that gentleman was held in the House of Commons, where his opinions met with but little sympathy, was a proof that steady perseverance, unbending consistency, and unflinching resolution, would sooner or later have their due reward. The next question was that of Church-rates, about which even some of their own were somewhat suspicious and doubtful. These rates were kept up very much for the same reason as the oaths test. It could not be for the sake of the money; for a Church which could do so much for itself would never keep up such an agitation for the sake of 230,000*l.* They were kept up partly as a badge of superiority and an instrument of coercion, and partly because it was argued, and very logically, that if there were State Churches, the funds for their repair and for the maintenance of their worship ought to be raised by public taxation. They had seen that there was a principle involved in the question, and it was because that principle of coercion had been conceded in the course of the last debate upon that matter that they ought to rejoice in the proposal for the ending of that great controversy. They would no doubt have liked it better if they could have done it in their own way, and could have secured the total and unconditional abolition of Church-rates; but they must remember that one condition was absolutely necessary in the present state of the question. It was a very small thing, but if the adherents of the Church of England thought it right to collect money for the repair of their churches, either by assessing themselves, or in some other way, it seemed to him that they had a perfect right to spend the money for themselves without any interference in the expenditure. (Hear, hear.) At present they were so under legislative control that they could not do this, and could not do anything in relation with it without the intervention of the vestry, in which every parishioner had a right to appear and to vote. Surely if the Dissenters had their principle conceded to them they might easily give up the legal right which the others would undoubtedly possess, and allow them to spend their money without any interference. They would not be prepared to concede anything beyond this, and if any compromise of their distinctive principle were proposed, they would at once say, that though they loved peace, yet truth and righteousness were greater blessings still, and that until the principle of perfect freedom in this matter was secured, they must keep up the controversy. Another question which was now being discussed was that of throwing open the national seats of learning to all classes of her Majesty's subjects. It seemed a strange thing that at this time of day they should be obliged to argue the right of all classes to take their proper place, whatever that place might be, in those institutions, and that if a gentleman of distinguished abilities had satisfied his examiners, and achieved the highest collegiate distinctions, that he had the right, although he might have the misfortune to be a Dissenter, to have the rewards which the Universities or the colleges had to bestow for such literary excellence. The thing was so self-evident that it was wonderful how it could ever have been in dispute, but they were bound to say that no action of the Liberation Society could ever have placed the question where it had now been placed by the action of men of liberal minds and of high culture and generous sentiment in the Church itself, who preferred justice to their own particular sect, and who were convinced that the present state of things was wrong, and had honestly determined that it should be rectified. It was a very encouraging sign of the times that both at Oxford and at Cambridge there was a growing appreciation among the undergraduates of the great principles of religious freedom and attachment to the rights of conscience, and a more earnest determination to sweep away the traditional barriers of exclusiveness in those Universities. He confessed that he had looked with some anxiety on the opening of those Universities under present circumstances, but he had found from the little experience he had had among undergraduates that there were within the walls of the University at the present time undergraduates surrounded by all the temptations which could appeal to ambitious men to desert their principles, but whose fidelity, consistency, and stedfastness were examples worthy of imitation by all around them. (Cheers.) But these were not the only signs of progress. They had now passed into the hands of a new Government, and they had great reason to congratulate themselves on the fact of Mr. Gladstone being now the leader of the Liberal party in the House of Commons. (Cheers.) He did not for a moment suppose that Mr. Gladstone sympathised with all their opinions, or that he was not a most loyal and devoted son of the Church of which he was so distinguished an ornament. (Hear, hear.) But in him they had to deal with a man of high principle, who would not truckle to mere expediency, and who desired to do right, and though he might sometimes come across them he would rather have to meet him as an opponent than he would meet with many men who were content to profess friendship simply because they thought it expedient to have their help. (Cheers.) A better tone was also marking men in other results of public life. There was a class known as "educated Liberals" who were better represented by Earl Grosvenor than by Mr. Gladstone, but there was amongst them greater sympathy with principles such as theirs than might have been expected. They did not believe in government by the people, but they did believe in government for the people, and with many of them that government would include religious equality. Even the *Times* had lately stated that religious equality was now demanded by all classes of the people. Another thing for thankfulness was the growth of similar principles to theirs in the Church of England itself. It had lately been stated by the *North British Review* that each year a quarter of a million of the income of the Church had been derived from private sources. He would not have it supposed, because they had made this progress, that they were going to win the battle at once. There were many honest and conscientious people on the other side, who believed their principles to be as Scriptural as they believed theirs to be. The question was not a Dissenter's question at all. What they asked was that the rights of religious equality should be recognised, and this was a question for them, not as Dissenters, but as citizens, and above all as Christians. The great difficulties which they had to meet were prejudice and ignorance, and a mistaken notion as to the object of the operations of the Liberation Society. The matter had to be decided, not by the Liberation Society, not by the Church-Defence Association, but as a matter of equity. What belonged to the nation, and what belonged to the Protestant Episcopal Church now established in this land, was not a question for them at all. They were seeking to maintain the grand principle that the Church of Christ ought to walk alone, without leaning on the State, and without accepting its support. If the clergy maintained the position they sometimes took, that the union of Church and State was necessary—not for the good the State did the Church, but for the good the Church did the State—they were the most unselfish and disinterested people in the world, for they submitted to all sorts of trials, and got no benefit after all. In conclusion he would say, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer had said, that time and the social forces were on their side. Every advance of intelligence, every development of popular sentiment, every recognition of popular right, was on their side. There might be before them a great mountain of opposition, but they had faith in principle, and taking their stand in the presence of the mountain, they said, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." (Loud applause.)

H. E CRUM-EWING, Esq., M.P., rose to second the resolution, and said he wished to express the pleasure and satisfaction he felt in being present at such a meeting, and to take even a very small part in the proceedings of the Society. The principle of maintaining the ordinances of the Gospel by voluntary aid was, as he understood it, the basis on which the Society had been formed, and as such he wished it all success. The voluntary principle was one he took the deepest interest in, and one to which he was attached by the strongest hereditary and family feelings, and, above all, by a conviction which had been gained by a study of the subject; that it was in strict accordance with Holy Scripture, which ought to regulate their affairs, whether as families or as nations. He rejoiced to find a Society existing in London so successful as that had been. There was great need for it, for the voluntary principle was not quite so well understood as it ought to be. He thought they were better informed on the subject in Scotland than they were in this country. There it was understood a great many years ago. It was true that principle was now in abeyance, but it was of the less consequence there because not less than two-thirds of the church-going population did support their own churches at their own expense. They might not be all voluntary in principle, but they were so in practice, and he had no doubt the theory would soon follow. They had an Established Church, but they had not many practical grievances to complain of. Mention had been made of the annuity-tax in Edinburgh, but generally, throughout Scotland, the clergy were paid, except in some of the towns, where their income arose from the pew-rents. With respect to the Church-rates, which had been alluded to both by the Chairman and the previous speaker, he had always voted against them ever since he had been in Parliament. Another grievance which was common to the whole of the kingdom was the oath which Dissenters were obliged to take if the would enjoy certain privileges in the Universities. No conscientious Dissenter would take such a pledge, and many of them had been excluded from the fellowships of the colleges on that account. Another grievance under which Dissenters lay was that they could not use the public burial-grounds without having the service of the Church of England read over the grave. Such a system served to keep the Dissenters under the heel of the Established Church. The clergy wished to show a domination over them, and to manifest their supremacy in all that they did. But above all the other grievances of the present system was the existence of an Established Church in Ireland. It was an institution which was established there against the wishes of the people, and held there in defiance of their religious feeling. It had been the root of all the internal mischief which had taken place in that island, and had been a source of national weakness to the mother country. It was an anomaly, and different very widely from the Establishment in England or in Scotland, for there at the Reformation the Churches were established at once as they now exist, and the people joined them from conscientious motives. But in Ireland the reformed faith was imposed by those whom the Irish considered as their conquerors and oppressors, and it has been held as the badge of degradation to them for 300 years. In Ireland there were about four millions and a half of Catholics, and only about 600,000 Episcopalians, and for that small minority there were two archbishops with 10,000*l.* and 8,000*l.* per annum respectively, and ten bishops having from 4,000*l.* to 6,000*l.* a year each, while there were canons, and archdeacons, and what not, and clergymen sometimes in parishes where there was not a single Protestant to minister to. Many plans for remedying that evil had been proposed; one was to take the funds from the richer parishes and to give them to the poorer ones—a system which he was sure would never be agreed to. Would the people of Ireland in the south be at all satisfied if the fruits of their land were taken to the other end of the island, to support the Protestant churches there? The *Times*, speaking of this plan, said, "It is hard enough for a man to have his tooth drawn out for his own good, but it is very bad to have them drawn to put into another man's head." (Laughter.) Another plan was to put all the funds of the Church into one common purse, and then to say to the congregations of all sects respectively, "Here is your share of the spoil." But the people of this country would not agree to that. In his opinion the only way to deal with this question was to take away altogether the special privileges the which Establishment has, to give up supporting in money or in property any Church or connexion, protecting all but favouring none. That was the only way that a State should deal with a church. Were this grievance removed from the sister isle, he could not doubt that the pure faith and the simple form of Christianity professed and exhibited by Protestants, would win its way to the hearts and minds of their reconciled Irish brethren.

T. BARNES, Esq., M.P. for Bolton, supported the resolution, and said it was not necessary to say anything in support of a resolution so ably moved and seconded. The resolution was one of rejoicing, and he would say that the Society had indeed cause for rejoicing, and they

had every reason to be encouraged to go on in their work. He did not know another society in the same position as that which theirs held. When they compared with other societies, they would see that its influence, the work it did, and its power in this country could not be measured by the number of its members, the amount of its funds, or the names of those who associated with it. What was it, then, which made that little Society so powerful? The fact that it had got hold of the *truth*, and sought to carry that truth out. He had heard the Council state that steps were being taken to influence the younger members of their body, and acquaint them with the principles they advocated. That was a very important work, and much as they had done, there was still much remaining to be done in that direction. There were other things to be done, too. They had not yet abolished all those barriers of separation between the different sections of the community. Until they could place the different classes of religious bodies in the same position socially as the various sections of scientific bodies, they would not have done their work. He longed for the time when the people of this country would no more think of making a distinction between the members of our religious bodies than they would think of raising up a social barrier between the people who believed in homœopathy and those who believed in allopathy. What had religious opinions to do with their standing in society? He believed they were going on to accomplish those ends. Looking at the way in which certain questions were taken up in this session as compared with previous sessions, he thought the Society had made much progress, not only in Parliament, but out of doors. Every member of the House of Commons knows the atmosphere which fills the House on the mooting of a religious subject, and that a different spirit pervades the whole place. Last session, would they ever have thought of taking the Church-rate question in the way in which they have done this session? What was the gist of a plan by Mr. Gladstone? Precisely the same as Mr. Bright threw out a long time ago. (Cheers.) How was it received then? With something like silent contempt. Now it is brought forward again, and promises to lead to some settlement of that harassing question. All that showed they were making progress. And so they would go on and see one thing after another give way, and bye-and-bye they would see banished from the arena of the House of Commons all questions of a religious character. He knew the idea had been prevalent that the object of the Society was inimical to the existence of the Church itself; but that was not so: its object was to liberate religion from State control. The Society had a political bearing, and therefore they, as members of the community at large, would fail in their duty if they did not continually stand up for the perfect equality of every person in that community. The Society had gone on well, was going on well, and he believed the day was not far distant when they would see most of its principles accomplished. They had reason to rejoice over the progress they had made, and to take courage to go on with the work.

The resolution was then put to the meeting and carried.

The Rev. Dr. KING moved the second resolution as follows:—

That the meeting recognises with pleasure the growth of a conviction that the establishment of the Church of England in Ireland is a grievous wrong to the inhabitants of that country, and demands the serious consideration of Parliament; and that, in the judgment of this meeting, no legislative change will be satisfactory, or lasting, which is not based on the withdrawal of State aid from all religious bodies in Ireland.

He said that words would be wasted in a brief speech such as his must be, if they did not bear directly upon the resolution before them. "My difficulty," said Sir Robert Peel, "is Ireland," and it was a difficulty which he had bequeathed to his successors in office. So much had the difficulty grown in its dimensions as to call for the serious attention, not only of the statesman, but of all who loved their country and sought the prosperity of the British Empire. The resolution was twofold—dealing with the evil and its remedy. With respect to the evil, it declared that the establishment of the Church of England in Ireland was a grievous wrong to the inhabitants of that country. That fact was acknowledged by eminent legislators, and by different political parties. It was not an ordinary grievance, but one that would demand the instant application of efficacious measures of relief. Ireland had a discontented population, a fact which was as indisputable as it was lamentable, which was as disadvantageous to themselves as it was dangerous to us. The Established Church had been a source of grievance to them ever since it was forced upon them—not the only one, but a principal one, and one that embittered all the others. Many disabilities had been removed, but with respect to the Established Church the legislature were doing the very thing which everywhere else was deprecated, saying, "Ours is the true religion, therefore we not only hold it ourselves but we thrust it upon you, and declare it to be the religion of the nation." Was that the constitution which the people of Ireland would have set up for themselves? To be in love with it, or even to lessen in their dislike for it, the Irish must lose all respect and make no account of subjugation and indignity. The Establishment was preparing the way for Ultramontane triumphs, and, indeed, the evil would not even end there. They incensed the Roman Catholic leaders by insulting their religion, and the baser sort manifested their hatred in Fenianism, whose leading principle was communism, and the seeking to recover property from those they regarded as plunderers. Once engender disaffection, and it will spread anywhere and everywhere beyond control. What was to be done? The resolution declared that no legislative change could be satisfactory or lasting which was not based on the withdrawal of State aid from all religious bodies in Ireland. What else was admissible? There had been a scheme propounded to divide the endowments between the two sects. That would undoubtedly raise a storm of opposition, and not tranquillise the parties by equalising them, for they would not be equalised. Another scheme was to give new endowments, which was so wild and extreme a proposition that it was difficult to speak of it gravely. New endowments for what? For its parishes without parishioners, and its pastors without flocks? People were really tiring of all those endowments and redistributions, in order that one party might buttress up the feebleness of the other. It required no prophetic spirit to foretell that their extension would be their extinction. Fenians were revolting from their hierarchy; and how much more would that be the case if they saw the priesthood subsidised by hush-money?—by that division of endowments—(Hear, hear)—the paid tools of a Government they had hitherto aspersed? He saw nothing to hope from the division or multiplying of endowments. What they had to fear was that pantheistic mode of largess to all religions, but as between the Establishment and Nonconformity they had nothing to dread. If they held by the voluntary principle, it would uphold them against all discouragements. The day of the abolition of endowments would be a blessed day for Ireland: then would the Protestant Churches be mission churches, be animated by the apostolic spirit, which would bring back the day of Apostolic triumphs, and make the labourer for Christ say when he saw the myrtle tree flourish instead of the briar,—"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." (Cheers.)

CHARLES REED, ESQ., F.S.A., said that after the exhaustive speech which they had just heard, the resolution wanted no seconding. When Mr. Dillwyn brought the subject before the House of Commons he simply asked it to affirm the proposition that the Church of England in Ireland was in an unsatisfactory state, and that was a very mild way of putting it. The indictment brought to-night put the thing in its proper place when it asserted that the present state of things was a grievous and a flagrant wrong, and he was sure there was no one present who would say that it was not. Perhaps Mr. Beresford Hope was the only man who could be found who would oppose the arguments which had been put before them. He heartily concurred in the suggestion that their young people should be taught the things in which they themselves took so great an interest. He knew that the question of the Irish Church was an inconvenient one, both on the other side of the Channel and in the House of Commons, and it led to one which was more inconvenient still. (Cheers.) At the Church Congress held last year at Norwich, Earl Harrowby was hissed when he asserted that the English Church in Ireland was an anomaly, and Mr. Beresford Hope replied that the Church in Ireland was only a branch, and could not therefore be so lively or so fruitful as the Church in England. (Laughter.) Mr. Reed then read several extracts from the opinions of Mr. Disraeli, Sir Robert Peel, and others upon the Irish Church, and in connection with the question of what was to be done with the funds, stated that the Roman Catholics would have nothing to do with them, and he believed the Presbyterians would not. It was quite useless to discuss that question now, but they all hoped that the day of the disendowment of the English Church in Ireland would speedily come. (Loud applause.)

The Rev. C. H. SPURGEON, who was greeted with great applause, moved:—

That, believing it to be, at the present time, the duty of the friends of Voluntaryism to advocate their principles with increased earnestness among all classes of the community, this meeting warmly approves of the recent measures of the Executive Committee having in view that object, and rejoices that augmented pecuniary resources will enable them energetically to prosecute this important department of the Society's operations.

There was an old proverb that if they gave a dog a bad name they might as well hang him, but this did not hold true as to men, except they were of the doggish stamp. All sorts of bad names had been given to those in connection with the work of the Society, and they were called by the terrible name of "political Dissenters." It used to be bad enough to be a Dissenter, but now certain of them were picked out, as being troublesome, radical, noisy boys, who must be at once put down because they were "political Dissenters," and there were even some of their own brethren who were mightily afraid of the title, and crept like snails into their shells when it was applied to them. A political Dissenter, according to some people, must be something very horrible; but he had been looking round the meeting, and he saw that it was composed of some of their most earnest members, deacons, and ministers, and he was persuaded that they were as spiritual-minded a body of men, and as active in the spread of the Gospel as any that could be brought together. (Hear, hear.) He intended spending a few moments in expostulating with those of his brethren who thought that it was wicked thus to agitate and, especially, to teach anything political. Some of these were superfine, hot-pressed, spiritually-minded people. He himself was met by a man of this sort when he was returning from going to vote at the last election, who told him he wondered how he could interfere in politics, because he was not a citizen of this world, but was a stranger and an alien. He replied that this was true of his spiritual nature, but not of his carnal nature. The man went on arguing the matter, but such people were perfectly absurd and inconsistent; for if they were attacked in the streets they would cry for the police, which they had no right to do according to their own dogma. If their property was in danger they would employ a solicitor to take the case into Court, but the Judge might very justly tell them, as they were not citizens, they had no rights. He held it to be a dishonest thing to join a community and enjoy its privileges without discharging its duties—(cheers),—and insomuch as in this country they did, happily, enjoy very great privileges as citizens, they were bound, as honest men, to discharge the duties which devolved upon them as citizens. He held that in this, as in some other respects, they were very much like sailors on board a ship where each one was bound to do his duty. What was the State but a goodly ship, and if they were borne across the billows of life in it? and surely whenever a crisis came they ought to take their fair share of the work. (Cheers.) Some other people said that they would hinder their spiritual-mindedness if they took any part in the business. All he would say to them was that the sooner they got a healthier kind of spiritual life the better. If they were too spiritual-minded to take a hand in abolishing anything that was erroneous and oppressive, they ought to be too spiritual-minded even to claim any protection, and to live a life of sufferance, and have themselves proclaimed as outlaws. Another class of people were those terribly conservative brethren who had sung to them as their lullaby those famous words, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, Amen." (Laughter.) These people were all for peace, and would do anything for a quiet life. They were very amiable, but their amiability was only gilded weakness. It was said of some that they were "as easy as an old shoe," and if they were so they were worth no more than old shoes. But this wish to lead a quiet life savoured of a very base kind of selfishness. If they had a principle which they would uphold, and about which they would not be silent, they might make up their minds that between here and heaven there was stormy weather for them, and that they would have to sail among many rocks, and have to feel their keel grating upon the quicksands. How was it possible to do anything for light without coming into collision with darkness, or to do anything for truth without being antagonistic to error? Though some might think it to be a very pleasant grace to be very quiet, there are other virtues to a Christian soldier besides a retiring disposition. He very much questioned whether a court-martial would think it a good excuse if a man considered himself so extremely modest as to consider himself unworthy of the attention of the gunners on the opposite side. They were sometimes told that Jesus Christ would never have interfered in this question. He was not so sure about that, but he never could believe in the Jesus Christ of some people, for the Christ in whom they believed was simply full of affectionateness and gentleness, whereas he believed that there never was a more splendid specimen of manhood, even in its sternness, than the Saviour; and the very lips which declared that He would not quench a bruised reed, uttered the most terrible anathemas upon the Pharisees, who formed the State Church in that day. (Cheers.) These people themselves seemed to lack manly vigour, but this should not be; and he should that they were rather like Job's war-horse, smelling the battle from afar. There were also a great number of good Nonconformists who did not join heartily in the work of the Society for want of thinking; and although it was said to be a bad thing to do another man's thinking for him, he would remind them of one or two things. They would all agree that, in this country, if the Constitution were really and truly carried out, the Government was in the hands of the people, and if the Government did not discharge its duties, then the responsibility rested with the people. Now would any of them wish to offer to God what they distrained by force from another man? He thought not, and yet they were really doing it unless they come out and helped those who were agitating against Church-rates, and they were responsible unless they gave their vote, and entered their protest to the fullest extent. Neither did they wish to punish any man for conscience' sake. Now they would not punish him for being a Baptist, nor keep him from the honours of the University if he had fairly earned them; but yet they all took part in doing this, because they were part of the governing power, unless they protested against it being done and exerted their influence against it. Would they like to be responsible for the iniquities of the Established Church? They would be very hardy sinners if they did, and yet they were responsible, both for that and for Maynooth, unless in some practical form they bore their witness against the endowment system. Was there any one there who would like to be accountable for the action of the Established Church in relation to the burial of unbaptized infants? A singular instance of this had just occurred. A poor woman in the country had three children at a birth, and as they were likely to die the curate was sent for to baptize them. The curate was busy, and did not go, and during the night two of the children died. Next morning the curate baptized the child left alive, which soon after died, and the mother asked if all three might be buried in one coffin. The curate consented, but the Evangelical rector heard of it and would not allow the service to be read over the two who had died during the night! The three children were put into one coffin, and when they got to the church the two were taken out and left on the belfry stairs, while the service was read over the other; some dirt was thrown in, which was afterwards removed, and the two other children placed in the coffin. (Cries of "Shame.") Could there be an atrocity so fearful? Yet these men were only acting in accordance with the regulations of the Church of England, and every one of those present would have a share in the responsibility of such an enormity if they did not fearlessly enter their protest against it. He took it to be the duty of a Christian man either to join that Society, or in some other form to advocate its principles, not only on the considerations which he had already ventured to offer, as to escaping from the responsibility of sin, but from the very highest principles of their religion. He looked upon the Society as a most potent and impressive declaration against persecution. They stood up boldly and declared their hearts and consciences were God's, and God's alone, and that none on earth should interfere with them or control them. He looked upon the Society, too, as lifting up a very bold testimony in the face of all men for the spirituality of religion. The day had gone by for controlling religion by the rack and the stake, but the same spirit still remained, and men were foolish enough to imagine that they would legislate for spiritual things by Acts of Parliament, whereas the spirit of true religion was too divine, too mysterious to come under the domination of man. There was one thing for which he liked the Society, and which had won for it his respect. He heard it said that some gentlemen, Dr. Foster and others, had done much mischief by declaring the objects of the Society too fully before a Parliamentary committee. He loathed all sorts of craft, and when he heard this he could see that the Society was an honest thing, and went not by policy but by principle. (Cheers.) If these principles were wrong let them give them up, but if they were right, as they knew them to be, then they must sink or swim by them. Mr. Spurgeon concluded by urging the meeting to renewed diligence in the battle in which they were engaged, and expressed a hope that in the end the victory would be with truth and with the right.

The Rev. MARK WILKS seconded the resolution, which was carried unanimously, and the meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the Chairman, proposed by Duncan Maclaren, Esq., M.P., seconded by Mr. Henry Lee, of Manchester, supported by Mr. Edward Miall.

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